

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 241

EA 015 259

TITLE Tying Research to Policy: Emerging Links and a Changing Consensus.

INSTITUTION Stanford Univ., Calif. Inst. for Research on Educational Finance and Governance.

SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.

PUB DATE 82

NOTE 13p.; Includes: IFG Policy Perspectives; Spr 1982. Not available in paper copy due to small print and colored paper of original document.

AVAILABLE FROM Publications, Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, School of Education/CERAS Building, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305.

PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

JOURNAL CIT IFG Policy Notes; v3 n2 Spr 1982

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.

DESCRIPTORS *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Needs; Information Scientists; *Network Analysis; *Policy Formation; *Research Needs; *Research Utilization; *Selective Dissemination of Information; Social Science Research; Special Education: State Action

ABSTRACT

This issue of "Policy Notes" examines some of the issues surrounding research dissemination, or the means by which policy-makers become aware of and assimilate research knowledge. The articles in this issue provide added perspectives to the findings of an Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance (IFG) survey, in three states, of policy-makers in the areas of school finance and education for handicapped children. The study reveals that policy-makers seem to know how to find research when they need it; most use it occasionally in their work, and half use it often. Survey respondents chose networks, groups of brokers sharing their concerns, as the single most important source of information. Carol Weiss relates the study's findings to others in such policy areas as health and to other levels beyond the state. Gail Meister and Michael Kirst discuss networks, their structure, and how they function and suggest further research questions. Arnold J. Meltsner questions the assumptions commonly held by those who conduct research on dissemination. Sandra L. Kirkpatrick describes IFG's dissemination program. In "Policy Perspectives," Linda Nelson summarizes portions of an IFG report "Policy Research and Educational Policy-Making: Toward a Better Connection." (Author/MLF)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

TYING RESEARCH TO POLICY

Emerging Links and a Changing Consensus

As education policy has become more complex and the need to demonstrate positive pupil outcomes has grown, policy research based in the social sciences has expanded rapidly. Despite a federal social science research budget that exceeded \$2 billion a year in 1978, there has been a pervasive feeling among policy makers and researchers alike that policy research either does not reach or is not used by educational policymakers. In the past decade, research and commentary on the use, nonuse, and misuse of research during the policymaking process has burgeoned. Legislators want reassurance that policy research is used during the enactment of programs. Otherwise, they see little justification for continuing to appropriate money to support it.

Every research organization faces the challenge of providing its product in a useful form to policymakers. Success in this area requires an understanding of potential users: their needs, their modes of obtaining information, and their potential use of policy research. This issue of *Policy Notes* examines some of the issues surrounding research dissemination, or the means by which policymakers become aware of and assimilate research knowledge.

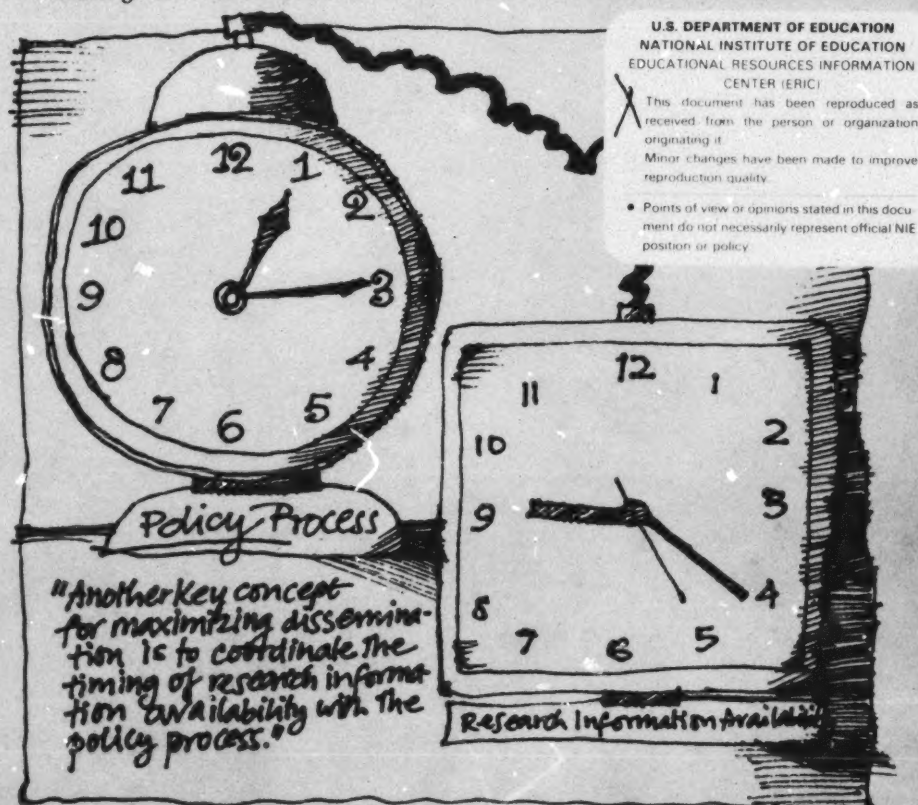
Much literature is pessimistic about the effectiveness of research dissemination to legislators, bureaucrats, interest groups, and so on. These analyses of research-policy ties find major communication problems between policymakers and researchers. Some of these problems are inevitable, they say, because policymakers and researchers live in two different worlds with differing languages, values and professional rewards. For example, researchers are promoted for publications in refereed journals that stress theory and technical advances. Predictably, the products from this world would have less immediate value for legislators who need information that is applicable to a specific set of circumstances.

Social science research is unlike research in the hard sciences, like physics or chemistry, where the outcomes are more certain and predictable. Rather, it identifies probable outcomes and general principles that seem to apply in various social settings. Policymakers face the task of taking general social science information and applying it to specific contexts. For example, policymakers confronting an education finance problem rely on general principles to analyze the relationship between revenues and various combinations of tax rates, tax bases and grant-in-aid formulas. However, contextual knowledge is necessary to estimate what is feasible in a specific political environment and administratively workable given the relations between vari-

ous levels of government.

More sophisticated studies, however, have probed the more indirect and subtle impacts of research and policy analysis. For instance, Carol Weiss contends that it is not the findings of a single study, nor those of a body of related studies that directly affect policy. Rather, she postulates that concepts and theoretical perspectives derived in research permeate the policy-making process. Research findings then percolate through that process and shape the way in which legislators think about educational issues. She terms this an "enlightenment function" of research.

IFG has created a research program on dissemination that benefits others as well as contributes to IFG's own dissemination



program. The project has focused on the least researched policy domain, the state level, where considerable financial and curricular control have been transferred during the past decade. In order to explore a range of responses, policymakers in the areas of school finance and education for handicapped children were selected in three different states — California, Maryland and Virginia. Three overarching questions guided the study:

- Do state education policymakers use research in their work?
- What are the information preferences of state education policymakers?
- Do patterns of information use emerge that suggest methods of targeting dissemination strategies to particular audiences, issues or states?

The survey, described more fully in the *Policy Perspective*, suggests that research dissemination may not be in the sorry state depicted in much of the literature. Policymakers seem to know how to find research when they need it; most use it at least occasionally in their work and half use it often.

An intriguing finding was the fact that survey respondents chose networks, groups of brokers sharing their concerns, as the single most important source of information. Networks appear to vary by policy issue area; for example, a creation science network functions very differently

from the minimum competency testing network. Research disseminators must learn to identify networks and understand how to direct their information to them.

The articles in this issue provide several added perspectives to IFG's state level study. Carol Weiss relates the study's finding to others in such policy areas as health, and to other levels beyond the state. She concludes that this work fits with the recent trend of dissemination findings. Arnold J. Meltsner moves beyond the data to suggest how policymakers ought to view research studies. While he is optimistic that dissemination can be improved, he cautions that realistic expectations are crucial.

Gail Meister and Michael Kirst discuss networks, their structure and how they function, and suggest further research questions. Sandra Kirkpatrick demonstrates how IFG implements this research in its dissemination effort. IFG publications must meet scientific criteria, but also need to be translated for use by brokers. By following some of the principles that have been highlighted by the research program on dissemination, IFG has been able to make a greater policy impact. Research can be a powerful asset for policymakers, but careful attention must be devoted to its form and distribution in order to make it maximally effective. ■

make. How much gain in student achievement are they willing to trade for legislative approval or voters' support? How much cost is justified to advance a given degree of distributional equity?

Perhaps the most salient feature of the IFG study, at least for those of us who study research use and knowledge transfer, is the emphasis on informal networks as the mechanism of diffusion. We have learned before that research knowledge gets around. (In one study, I tagged the phenomenon "knowledge creep.") This study suggests more clearly than previous work that a major channel for diffusion is the set of informal contacts that active participants in an issue arena maintain with each other. If researchers and analysts are hooked into the relevant issue networks, they have the opportunity to put research findings into circulation. And of course, they also receive communications from decision makers, messages that specify their concerns, positions, and definitions of the situation, which can influence the direction of future research.

Previous studies of knowledge transfer among scientists have alerted us to a similar phenomenon in scientific circles. Up-to-the-minute research findings travel informally and come to the attention of insiders long before they reach journal publication. It would not be surprising if educational policymakers who value sound empirical evidence similarly shared the latest information with the people with whom they work, certainly with people on the same side of an issue and perhaps with those who are uncommitted and with adversaries as well.

One of the important things that remains to be learned is the content of the messages that move around the policy issue networks. It seems likely that research findings *per se* are seldom the nub of the message (unless specific factual data are needed for an immediate purpose), since findings have little meaning devoid of a context. It is probable that as news travels, decision makers combine data and research-derived generalizations with other information and with ideological and interest-based positions. Research information may well coalesce with people's prior advocacy positions and come into currency as part of a policy argument. When research is embedded in an implicit stance of support or opposition to a particular policy course, it takes on the characteristics of relevance, feasibility, and timeliness that state educational decision makers say they want.

Some social scientists have lamented the use of research to justify people's pre-existing positions. They see efforts to use

Research Use in A Political Context Commentary by Carol Weiss

State educational decision makers are interested in relevant research; they know where to find out about it; they tend to keep well informed about its results. That is the general message of IFG's recent three-state study on research dissemination. The findings would have sounded suspiciously pollyanna-ish to social scientists five or six years ago, when the prevailing theme in the academic literature was the vast gulf between the world of research and the world of political decision making. But several recent studies have come out with similar findings: political actors care about — and know about — the basic trends of research in their fields. It is encouraging to see convergent evidence for educational decision makers at the state level.

Such findings do not necessarily imply that decision makers *act* upon the specific recommendations that emerge from research reports. They want to know what research has to say. But as previous

studies have shown, decision makers process research information, along with a large array of other information, and filter it through their own judgement. In the complex world of policy making, they have to take account of more factors than any one research study, or even a body of research studies, encompasses.

They are concerned with values, i.e. with the ideological positions that research supports or challenges. They have to take account of interests, i.e. the effects of policy proposals on organizational survival and well-being, personal careers and advantage, both in terms of their own stakes and those of other policy actors. They need to worry about the cost implications of alternative policies.

Research can be, and often is, useful for clarifying the likely consequences of different policy actions. But given that information, decision makers have to use their experience and judgement to decide on the trade-offs that they are willing to

Research as ammunition in bureaucratic and political battles as flagrant misuse. I don't see it as an illegitimate use of research. I think that partisans of a policy proposal are warranted in using supportive evidence to lend credence to their positions, so long as they do not distort the evidence or attempt to suppress those pieces that do not fit their case.

Once decision makers become habitual users of research, however self-serving their motives may be at the outset, they become accustomed to looking for data, patterns of association, evaluations of past outcomes, likely costs and benefits and distributional consequences of future options. Such information begins to shape their understanding of the issues and their order of priorities. In time, it may lead them to reconsider their previous positions and venture onto new courses. In

fact, it can help them redefine not only their old assumptions about the nature of problems and workable remedies for them. It may even alter their definitions of their own interests and the interests of their organizations and constituencies.

The fact that state educational decision makers turn to research through a variety of channels suggests a receptivity to new facts and fresh insights. This has got to be good news. The fact that they are in personal touch with researchers, experts, and academic consultants suggests that they are feeding their knowledge, questions, and perspectives into the research process. To the extent that this is true, not only in words on a questionnaire but in actual deed, the news is even better. Out of such continuing interaction, more enlightened approaches to policy are bound to emerge. ■

Stephen K. Bailey

The IFG staff notes with sadness the death of Professor Stephen K. Bailey of the Harvard Graduate School of Education on March 27, 1982. Dr. Bailey was a member of the National Advisory Board of IFG since its inception, and also served as Chairman of the group. A former Dean of the Maxwell School of Public Administration at Syracuse University and Vice President of the American Council on Education, he established himself as the father of the fields of politics of education and policy analysis of education. He was a highly productive individual in terms of his scholarship, his generation of ideas, and his contributions to the thinking of others and support of their work. We will miss him greatly.

HOW DOES INFORMATION TRAVEL?

Different Issues, Different Networks

Educational policy issue networks can be powerful agents for change and the dissemination of research information. Networks are social systems whose membership, structures, operations and life cycles can be characterized. Issue networks focus on the advocacy or analysis of a specific policy. They link members informally across formal decision making lines by channeling information, resources, psychological support and learning from one part of the network to another. Network theory suggests that, in many cases, a policy issue such as school finance reform emerges on a state's formal political agenda only after it succeeds sufficiently in capturing the attention of legislators whose time and energy are strictly rationed. In fact, the presence of networks may be more powerful than a state's social or economic characteristics in predicting an issue's inclusion on a state's policy agenda.

School finance reform is an issue which can be used to demonstrate how networks function. In the 1970s, over twenty states revamped their school aid formulas to assist the lowest spending or least property wealthy school districts. The states which adopted school finance reform fit none of the traditional expectations of leadership. Analysis of reform versus non-reform states uncovered no strong regional impact of followers and leaders within geographic sections of the country.

Focusing on the diffusion of an innovation, school finance reform, seemed to obscure actual political processes. There appeared to be no significant relationship between school finance reform and such measures as per capita income and urbanization.

While traditional interest group theory stresses that policy change is motivated by producer oriented interest groups, teacher and other employee organizations were not crucial factors in the adoption of school finance reform. Moreover, the power of the relationship between government agency heads, legislative committees and producer interests, or the so-called "iron triangle", was not evident in this reform. Nor was the federal role in school finance reform large, and what involvement occurred was limited to supporting research and a subordinate network role.

It appears that educational finance networks account for the pattern of finance reforms. Political science, sociology, education and organizational behavior studies all address network theory both in their own contexts and in some common form. Members of policy networks are usually brought together by shared discontents and grievances. Policy network leadership varies widely. A single individual or a few critical figures can direct the flow of information, referrals or support, while the leadership of other networks may be ambi-

guous and changing. The network's structure is also highly variable; the interactions between members can be more or less reciprocal, and their links may or may not be cohesive and stable. A networks' adoption of single or multiple purposes helps determine its structure and affects its longevity. A network's operation determines the nature of the resources that link the members. Typical resources include information, facilities, money, labor and legitimacy. Policy network characteristics allow researchers to analyze and group them along a continuum of member consensus ranging from total commitment to a single goal to general identification with a vague concept.

Cases

Current research investigating the effect of four issues upon the policy agendas of California, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Texas and Washington suggests that the progress of a particular issue bears a striking resemblance across states. This resemblance results from action by interstate policy issue networks which can apparently overcome political or economic differences among states, even when states differ markedly as to fiscal and legislative capacity, and state policy centralization. These networks have transmitted such diverse policy issues as minimum competency testing for high school students, school finance reform, collective

bargaining for teachers and creationism across the nation.

Creationism. The creationism network has a single purpose and promotes a single issue. This network advocates changes in science texts and courses to stress "creation science" as explained in the Bible rather than evolutionary theory. A small leadership group provides a highly centralized guidance and advocates effectively a single position resulting in identically worded legislation proposed in several states. There is consistency in this network's membership across the states, both in terms of shared moral values and commitment to a goal over time. These features promote promulgation of a single political solution, a model state statute.

Minimum Competency Testing. At the opposite pole from creationism lies minimum competency testing for high school students. The issue of minimum competency testing, supported for the most part by non-educators, has moved through thirty-eight states without any centralized support and with no single agency or group of people playing an advocacy role. It resulted in tests for high school graduation in some states and a revamped curriculum for several grades in others. However, a network was engendered by mass media's spotlighting of the issue nationwide and by various independent agencies (such as Education Commission of the States) providing vehicles for communication of information and expertise. These agencies, along with the technical and legislative assistants who helped shape individual state versions of minimum competency testing legislation and guidelines, merely reacted to requests for technical assistance rather than introducing or advocating the concept.

The spread of minimum competency testing through the mass media mirrors its reception by an equally diffuse mass public. Often a lone leader, such as California State Assemblyman Gary Hart or the then Massachusetts Commissioner of Education Gregory Anrig, sculpted the awareness and concern into an appropriate item on the state agenda. The spontaneous and idiosyncratic forms of minimum competency testing policies in different states, and the looseness or lack of any leadership hierarchy categorizes this network's consensus as one of vague concept agreement.

School Finance Reform. The school finance reform network was characterized by fairly centralized coordination and guidance from the Ford Foundation and similar proposals for policy solutions

across states. The school finance reform network diverges from creationism in two other important respects.

First, network membership was neither consistent from state to state at any one time, nor within any one state over time. Teacher organizations were in the school finance reform coalition sometimes and only in some states—a phenomena called "rolling coalition". Network elements were diverse and included lawyers to sue states; private agencies such as state branches of the League of Women Voters to spread the concept; scholars to testify; groups like the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Education Commission of the States to provide technical assistance; state politicians and political committees such as the Governor's Citizens Committee on Education in Florida or the Oregon Legislature's Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity to channel work of scholars and technical assistance groups; minority oriented research and action centers to underscore minority concerns; and graduate students

briefly . . .

Consulting editor for this issue of *Policy Notes* and author of "Tying Research to Policy—Emerging Links and a Changing Consensus" is Michael Kirst, professor of education at Stanford University and past president of the California State Board of Education. As an individual who has been part of both policy and research worlds, Kirst's current research interests concern networks, the structures where researchers and policymakers meet. "How Does Information Travel—Different Issues, Different Networks," by Gail Meister and Kirst, is based upon that work. Meister is a doctoral student in applied policy analysis in the School of Education at Stanford.

"Research Use in a Political Context," written by Carol Weiss, reviews the findings of an IFG study within the framework of other dissemination research. Weiss is a senior associate and lecturer at the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University. In "Information Biases: Attitudes and Expectations," Arnold J. Meltzer questions the assumptions commonly held by those who conduct research on dissemination. Meltzer is professor of political science at the Graduate School of Public Policy, University of California at Berkeley. "Putting Research to Work," by Sandra L. Kirkpatrick, is a description of IFG's dissemination program by the assistant director for dissemination.

to prepare themselves as the next generation of school finance reformers.

Second, the rolling coalition membership advocated broader policy solutions which in turn required the building of different coalitions within each state. The consensus of the school finance reform network can be characterized as a "core agreement" on the issues of equity distribution and increased school funding.

Collective Bargaining. The collective bargaining for teachers network is located between the core concept agreement of the school finance reform network and the vague concept agreement of the minimum competency testing network. Although network members are consistently arrayed across states in the traditional role of labor in dispute with management, and although the two teacher organizations, National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT), generated state and national activity around the policy issue, the collective bargaining network is distinguished by multiple purposes and by considerable local initiative.

Nationally, NEA, for example, created local capacity for reorienting the NEA state organizations toward collective bargaining through the Uniserv program that paid the salaries of local collective bargaining advocates. At the same time, NEA moved toward the national goal of a unified dues structure tying local, state and national membership fees together. Thus, resources delivered through staff connections to the national level and through special meetings and national conventions were applied differentially in various state and local settings. The policy results were independently reached and yet similar and traditional solutions prevailed. "Simple concept agreement" characterizes the consensus of the collective bargaining network.

Conclusions

The mix of a network's leadership, membership, structure and operation creates the network's power to facilitate or constrain change in the educational policy arena. Policy networks can be characterized by the kind of consensus their members maintain on key issues. The diversity and rigidity of policy solutions advocated by different networks reflects their different consensus.

Further IFG research in this area will test the dimensions and classifications of other networks. Such work will add to the growing understanding of how interstate policy issue networks affect state policy agenda setting and how they relate to research dissemination.

Putting Research To Work

IFG not only produces research on educational finance and governance, but it disseminates the findings of that research widely. As with other research organizations, IFG faces the challenge of discovering the best method for distributing these research findings to various audiences. The many audiences who use research on educational finance and governance have different needs, though those differences are often unclear, and there are few standard guidelines to constructing an effective dissemination strategy to meet those various needs. Traditional strategies specify conferences and large-scale mailings as a way of transferring knowledge from one group to another. But these methods do not distinguish between audiences,

and can often be highly inefficient and costly.

Consequently, IFG has conducted research on dissemination to determine the relevant audiences for IFG, what their information needs and uses might be, how they obtain the information they use in the policymaking process, and how IFG can be most effective in responding to those needs. The results of this ongoing research program suggest several key elements to a successful dissemination strategy.

- Different audiences have different needs with respect to the form in which research findings are presented.

- There are a number of avenues, other than the written word, by which research

information can be transmitted.

- Information networks and brokers are key sources of research information for policymakers.

Dissemination Strategies

IFG's initial product, the research document must meet the rigorous requirements of one audience; it is designed to summarize research methods and findings for the scientific and professional community. It does so in highly technical terminology which includes a description of and justification for the research method used by the researcher and a detailed elaboration of the research findings. Although the length, style and format of the reports may be appropriate for a research or academic audience, these very elements make the report seem dense, abstract and overly technical to practitioners and other audiences concerned with using

PATTERN OF AUDIENCE REQUESTS IN RESPONSE TO INFORMATION SOURCES

A press release in May 1981 announcing the research report, "Why Kids Drop Out of High School" by Russell W. Rumberger, stimulated the *Los Angeles Times* to prepare and nationally syndicate a story. Other newspapers reprinted the story that spring, and state and federal policymakers requested the research report in high volume. During the summer specialized newsletters featured notes about the dropouts research, based on the news story. The number of requests made by policymakers dropped while those made by educators increased substantially. In the fall, when educational publications continued to feature the story, local school and district personnel responded with a growing volume of requests.

		Information Sources	Audience Requests
Spring Quarter, 1981	<i>Los Angeles Times</i> , front page	1.5 million general circulation	Academics 24%
	<i>San Jose Mercury</i> , front page	250,000 general circulation	Policymakers 31%
	<i>Sacramento Bee</i>	225,000 general circulation	Educators 7%
	<i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>	100,000 general circulation	Other 39%
	<i>Columbus (OH) Dispatch</i>	350,000 general circulation	
	<i>Chicago Sun Times</i>	700,000 general circulation	Total Number
	<i>Trenton (NJ) Times</i>	90,000 general circulation	of Requests 125
	<i>News and Observer (Raleigh, NC)</i>	160,000 general circulation	
	KMPC radio (L.A.) talk show	general audience	
	WMPC radio (N.Y.) talk show	general audience	
Summer Quarter, 1981	KKIK radio (CA) news	country music	
	KCBS radio (San Francisco)	general audience	Academics 17%
	CNN TV interview	subscription audience	Policymakers 20%
	<i>Education Daily</i>	education: policymakers & practitioners	Educators 47%
	<i>Education & Work</i>	education: vocational education	Other 17%
	<i>Report on Education Research</i>	education: academics & policymakers	
	<i>Report on Education of the Disadvantaged</i>	education: special interest	Total Number
	NYSSBITS	special interest: New York State School Boards Association	of Requests 392
Fall Quarter, 1981	<i>How To Evaluate: Education Programs</i>	education	
	ERS Bulletin	special interest: academics & policymakers	Academics 11%
	<i>Education USA</i>	special interest: National School Public Relations Association	Policymakers 8%
	<i>Educational R&D Reports</i>	Research and development: CEDaR, academics & practitioners	Educators 78%
			Other 4%
			Total Number of Requests 447

the most current knowledge available in the field.

As a result of its research on dissemination, IFG has implemented a variety of strategies for informing a greater number of audiences interested in research findings. A quarterly Announcement of Publications, which includes the abstracts of the sixty or more research reports produced annually by IFG, is mailed to academics, state and federal policymakers, professional educators, public interest groups and selected members of the media. In response to requests, research documents are sent to academics, educators, interested individuals and persons in policy positions, and there is evidence that they have been used by policymakers to inform new legislation. The Announcement itself serves to alert those in the media and public interest organizations to current areas of research and policy interest, and to inform them of a source of information in those areas.

In addition, *Policy Notes* and *Perspectives* informs recipients of current IFG research on specific issues, describing major policy dilemmas and recent research findings. The format translates these results into concise briefs that could help federal and state policymakers frame policy questions or alert them to the policy implications of a given issue. The *Perspective*, especially, attempts to focus in greater depth on a particular topic for those interested in more analysis and information. Recent issues of the *Policy Notes* have addressed such issues as the failing legitimacy of the schools, education for the handicapped, categorical grant programs for education, bilingual education for Hispanics and choice in education.

Research findings are also distributed through means other than the written word. Conferences based on a specific policy issue bring policymakers and researchers together to discuss issues in education from their various points of concern. Seminars, such as a recent one on tuition tax credits, serve the same purpose: 15 papers were presented, each on a different issue, to an audience of federal legislators, policy analysts and citizens from a variety of interest groups. The research information was shared in a face-to-face situation, including a formal debate with opportunity for dialogue among individuals and groups. The information was further distributed in research reports and appeared in *Policy Notes* and *Perspectives*. A videotape of a portion of the seminar has been viewed by Parent-Teachers Associations, parent coalitions and lobbying organizations around the country. Such seminars provide participants with new channels of information exchange, and IFG with new

perspectives for its research.

Dissemination research has also revealed the importance of networks and brokers in transferring information to various constituencies. Trying to reach brokers and networks through the traditional method of bulk mailings is expensive and inefficient, as the research producer does not know what audiences are successfully being reached. IFG has refined its mailing list of 3,000 to include those specifically interested in IFG research. These individuals or organizations automatically receive the Announcement of Publications and *Policy Notes* and *Perspectives*, which serve to alert the recipients to the information available. The recipients are also encouraged to reprint articles and distribute the information through their own channels and organizations. In this manner, IFG has been able to make its information available to an audience much larger than its mailing list. In turn, the audiences disseminate IFG information through their own organizations and networks.

IFG also prepares press releases for the popular media, highlighting new results

of current research. The resulting news stories generate interest by audiences not targeted by the mailing list, and identifies for the general public a new information source for material on educational finance and governance.

Audience Responses

In the course of one year, requests for IFG research reports have increased dramatically. Those from federal and state policymakers have doubled over the course of the legislative calendar year. Over one-fourth of the requests came from schoolteachers and district level personnel in both private and public schools, strongly indicating their increased activity as research consumers.

By monitoring these requests, IFG has been able to identify more precisely who its audiences are, when they prefer to receive their research information, and which materials are of greatest interest to them. Academics comprise 24 percent of IFG's mailing list and their requests for research reports conform very clearly to the academic calendar year — a high request volume in the fall and winter, lower in the spring and lowest in the summer. Seldom are requests from academics a result of a review of the material in either the popular media or the education media.

On the other hand, policymakers are most likely to hear about IFG research from the popular media. Although they do not request as many research papers as other constituencies, they seem to use *Policy Notes* and *Perspectives* to a greater extent. It is interesting to note that just before the end of the legislative calendar year, they request, at double their previous rate, research reports on methods of financing various educational programs.

Local school and district personnel comprise only ten percent of the mailing list, yet they account for over one-fourth of the requests for full research reports. They seem most likely to respond to announcements of research by brokers and have done so in steadily increasing numbers. Interests in this group are varied, as would be expected from a category including teachers, administrators and superintendents from public and private schools.

Conclusions

The volume of requests for research publications and the variety of the requesters suggest that there is greater demand for substantive information than is traditionally believed by the popular media. Many of the research reports most frequently requested discuss such theoretical issues as seniority systems, the selection of school textbooks, legalization in education and youth unemployment.

The Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance (IFG) is a national research and development center funded principally by the National Institute of Education (NIE) under authority of section 405 of the General Education Provisions Act as amended by section 403 of the Education Amendments of 1976 (P.L. 94-482). The Institute is administered through the School of Education at Stanford University and is located in the Center for Educational Research at Stanford (CERAS).

IFG *Policy Notes* is a quarterly newsletter produced with support from the National Institute of Education, Department of Education. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the National Institute of Education or the Department of Education. Nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. Reprint rights are granted with proper credit.

Policy Notes welcomes your comments and suggestions. For additional information regarding IFG, copies of papers listed herein, or the announcements of past and future IFG publications, please contact:

Sandra Kirkpatrick
Assistant Director for Dissemination
IFG — CERAS Building
Stanford University
Stanford, Calif. 94305-1691
(415) 497-2754

POLICY NOTES

Nancy C. Stone Editor
Michael Kirst Consulting Editor
Esperanza Kelly Support Staff

ADMINISTRATION OF IFG

Henry M. Levin Director, IFG
Jay G. Chambers Associate Director, IFG
Bernadine Murray Assistant Director,
Administration, IFG
Sandra L. Kirkpatrick Assistant Director,
Dissemination, IFG

Rather than offer surprising conclusions or solutions, they describe the present state of affairs, examine shortcomings and suggest possible alternatives. What this means for IFG is that it is increasingly important to monitor audiences and remain aware of their changing interests and concerns.

Through its research on dissemination, IFG has successfully implemented a vari-

ety of strategies enabling the results of the Institute's research to reach many audiences and to be used for multiple purposes. IFG will continue to coordinate its own dissemination research with dissemination practices by applying general findings and monitoring the feedback from publications requests. Helpful comments and suggestions from readers are welcomed. ■

Information Biases: Attitudes and Expectations

Recent Reagan administration budgetary cuts in social science research will again call into question the utility of social science and policy research. Governmental sponsors of social science research quite understandably expect it to have some public policy relevance. Those in an environment of increasing budgetary cuts and stress have little choice but to insist that the connection between research and policymaking be made in a visible and tangible way.

When the connection between researchers and policymakers is less than ideal, public managers typically explain the problem as inadequate communication between the producers and consumers of research. Defining the problem in these terms is deceptively simple. From the policymakers's perspective it can be asked "What do producers of research information do to communicate with us?" This question optimistically assumes that answers to complex problems exist if only research producers would provide information in appropriate language and through accessible channels to consumers.

On the other hand, how do consumers of research make use of the information they obtain from researchers? This question from the researcher's perspective naively assumes that no organizational imperative or political considerations will compromise the information or interfere with the use of the research. By phrasing the questions in this manner, two solutions usually suggest themselves: research is needed to find out about the dissemination and use of research and, at the same time, researchers have to be encouraged to do more on dissemination and to do so in a visible manner. Both solutions ignore important obstacles to communication between researchers and policymakers.

Motivation and Information

There are problems associated with motivating people and organizations to

communicate and use research. Some research indicates that neither consumers nor producers of research are terribly concerned about policy communication and there may be little reason to be agitated about the lack of communication. Policymakers do use research and know where to find it when they need it.

From the researcher's perspective, there are few rewards for active, time-consuming dissemination. The publish-or-perish norms of a university environment can be satisfied by having research results published in traditional journals, and academic tenure is not achieved by participation in the policy process. An enhanced reputation for researchers inside and outside a university is likely to come from contributions to the researcher's field and through contacts developed with peers instead of helping policymakers. Many researchers do participate and help inform the policymaking process, but the general lack of rewards may partially explain the researcher's ready acceptance of prevailing communication practices.

Most concern for policy communication rests on some shaky assumptions. It is assumed that knowledge producers are interested in having their product "consumed" and that policymakers are interested in consuming knowledge that would actually help them. But these assumptions ignore other interests and priorities held by both policymakers and researchers.

Policymakers usually have a great deal of research data, but still want different or more specific information in order to reduce uncertainty and anxiety about the decisions they make. Somehow the information on hand never quite fits the policymaker's needs at a given point in time, because each new program or law creates a demand for different information. When policymakers say they need demographic and impact data, they mean specific information about particular populations in certain situations. Their information needs are grounded in idiosyncratic contexts which vary widely. Researchers and social

scientists, who are interested in generalization and causation, are not likely to be the ones to meet this need. It is a mistake to expect routine informational needs to be a byproduct of non-routine researcher interests and tasks.

Brokers and Networks

It is not appropriate to limit the discussion to distinctions between producers and consumers of research. The actual policy communication world is much more complicated. Researchers can be policymakers and policymakers can be researchers. In addition there is an intermediate category of participant: the information broker.

Brokers come in all sizes and shapes — bureaucrats who decide what research is needed, trusted friends who can be called, legislators who pass on some information to a colleague, policy analysts who gather evidence from the research literature, and managers who decide which research will be communicated. Organizations can also be brokers by acting as two-way conduits of information. Brokers exist as participants in the process of policy research communication because the other participants find them convenient to use. They take care of the paperwork and they talk the right language.

For both researchers and policymakers brokers are too easy to use. Using a broker relieves the researchers of the responsibility to communicate directly with policymakers. Similarly, policymakers can use material already synthesized by the broker. Since policymakers are busy people, they opt for a convenient and proximate source. But because brokers are so convenient, policymakers as well as researchers must be able to calibrate and judge them.

Brokers can be a two-way distortion device. When a broker is told what information is needed or is available, the broker is likely to filter what has been said to meet individual and organizational imperatives and to report selectively. If the sources of information are not independent of each other, then a policymaker risks receiving biased information.

When looking for information that is easily accessible and can be trusted, policymakers often turn to their own or a related organization. Networks, really collective brokers, are such sources. The network is close by; its members only a telephone call away; and it is usually built on trust, shared values and goals. Networks are informally structured and often not very apparent.

An important consideration for the policymaker who uses network information is the slant or bias of that information. Networks are not neutral. Many of them

come into existence because their members share an interest in a policy concern. As a political entity, the network will not offer competing facts, interpretations, and policy alternatives. The politicized network can be a closed and circular information source.

Thus the policymaker has the same difficulty with information from a network as from a broker. The network is a very convenient way of learning something, but it takes effort to calibrate the bias of a network. The network is just as likely to suppress information as to disseminate it. While the network's members may see themselves as an information sharing group, they do have policy interests and will promote them. Policymakers should

reach to outside, independent sources of information.

Expectations and Research

The dissatisfied policymaker need not sit by and equate research with waste. Policymakers are in a position to do something about the communication situation, because it is they who set in motion most of the applied research agenda. They can influence the expectations and behavior of the research community.

Most research producers do not expect that their research will result in specific action or changes in public policy. To them, effective dissemination means making someone aware that information

exists or increasing that person's understanding about the significance of the information to his or her concerns.

Research does improve the richness of current policy discussion and can enhance a base of knowledge, but a lot of research is simply creative storage, a way of building up capacities in people and in organizational files, to be tapped at the appropriate moment. Policymakers should see that they are investing in people who can be called upon when needed instead of expecting to get full use out of each research report. Not every job or task requires research and not all research is usable, but too often the policymaker's concern is about immediate and specific utility instead of long-term storage. ■

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON EDUCATIONAL
FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE
CERAS Building
Stanford, California 94305-1691
(415) 497-0957

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Palo Alto, Calif.
Permit No. 28

IFG

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON EDUCATIONAL FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION

Bridging the Gap Between Research and Policy

By Linda Nelson

Transferring the knowledge gained through social science research to public policymakers is a highly uncertain endeavor. Little theory exists to explain how the general implications of social science research enter into discussions of specific policy issues. Empirical studies have helped to dispel the notion that policy makers completely disregard research information, yet the precise reasons why only some research is used by public leaders remain unclear.

Many commentators claim that communication problems between policymakers and researchers are unresolvable. The two groups live in different worlds with differing languages, values and professional rewards. Inevitably the research products of one world have little intrinsic use in the policy work of the other.

The results of two surveys by IFG's Policy Communication Research Project suggest that the wall between researchers and policymakers is not so impermeable. The surveys were designed to determine if research producers can better meet the needs of research consumers through specific dissemination strategies. In one survey, leaders in school finance and social education policy in California, Virginia and Maryland were asked to identify the types of information they used most frequently in their work. They were also asked to specify the qualities of research information which made it more or less useful. The leaders who were surveyed

represented different educational issues, different types of policy audiences and states with differing capacities to incorporate research into policy deliberations as reflected in the number and type of staffing positions in their legislatures and offices.

In the second survey, organizations which produce research information were asked to describe the various dissemination methods they used and to specify those which they found to be most effective. They were also asked to identify their dissemination goals. The research producing organizations surveyed included professional associations, government agencies, technical assistance and lobbying groups.

By focusing on the state level of policymaking, the Policy Communication Project report is timely. Current restructuring of the federal role in education has placed unprecedented responsibility on state governing bodies. In a number of states, the financing of education is in flux and even the basic premise of schooling as a public good is being questioned. Seldom have state policymakers been so in need of accurate information to address their concerns.

Policymakers Use Research

According to the state survey results, research does play a prominent role in educational policymaking in the areas of school finance and special education. Research keeps policymakers aware of emerging issues and gives direction to discussions which shape or refine education policies. Public leaders in all states surveyed say they use research information regularly. A substantial majority said they know how to obtain research findings when needed. Eighty-five percent of the respondents use research at least occasionally in their work, and half of that group use research often. Most respondents have

worked in their respective areas for six or more years and have developed strategies to help them keep abreast of current research developments for use in pending policy debates.

These strategies for finding research information vary at different times in the policy cycle. When policy issues are being shaped, state policymakers in all states report a high reliance on information informally gathered from colleagues, and from newsletters, journals and draft reports. Given a choice, policymakers say they would prefer to telephone trusted experts for a quick briefing on research relevant to a particular policy discussion. This information serves the function of keeping them aware of new policy concerns and of providing the contextual background to new research findings. It appears that policymakers in both areas, school finance and education for the handicapped, exchange ideas with informed colleagues regularly and attempt to build consensus on an appropriate policy direction before legislation is written. Some research indicates that policymakers within informal networks generate and disseminate information that actually determines which issues arise on the public agenda.

In later stages of policymaking, officials rely on formal, routine information channels associated with day-to-day policy work: they turn to research, statistical compilations, personal and departmental files, and formal testimony. These information sources are reported by respondents to be factual in orientation rather than speculative and directly relevant to specific policy discussions.

Employees of state education departments appear to confine information searches to sources close at hand that are directly linked to the policy process of the bureaucracy. These sources include state and federal education departments,

reports from contract firms hired to conduct predefined research, and state legislative libraries. It appears that outsiders not directly tied to the formal information-gathering process have little chance of penetrating bureaucratic policy communication channels unless they are known and trusted. In contrast, legislative officials are most likely to use information

Given a choice, policymakers say they would prefer to telephone trusted experts for a quick briefing on research relevant to a particular policy discussion.

originating outside the formal information-gathering channels. Not only do these political actors rely heavily on informal networks for information, they also use information provided by professional associations and special interest groups more frequently than do bureaucrats. Both political actors and bureaucrats face legislative time constraints. They want high quality information in a short period of time. It must coincide with the legislative processes and address specific problems.

A comparison of the responses of policymakers in the areas of school finance and special education reveal that different policy issues have different constituencies and produce different information needs. For example, school finance formulas are highly technical, based on quantitative data, and directly controlled by legislative action. Not surprisingly, school finance policymakers require information that emphasizes technical qualities of research and takes into consideration legislative timing concerns.

Additionally, school finance experts have had greater exposure to research reports and findings on their subject, as this issue has been on the public agenda since the 1972 *Serrano* court decision. They report a high dissatisfaction with the language of research and its infeasibility, limited relevance and neutrality.

On the other hand, those concerned with education for the handicapped include political interest groups, educators, and administrative and education professionals of state departments of education in addition to the policymakers. These policymakers are required to implement an ambiguous law, PL 94-142, in an area of education where there is little unanimity of opinion among the experts. They report a need for information that challenges current beliefs and assists with long range planning. They are frustrated by the sheer unavailability of useful and substantive research relevant to their policy area. The relative newness and complexity of this issue may account for this group's report of a desire for comprehensive and pertinent information.

Brokers and Networks are Important

Key individuals and organizations function as pivotal research translators, adapting the general language of social science research to specific educational policy problems and disseminating that information among state policymakers. This role tends to expand awareness of research and increase its use. Finding and translating social science research information to make it useful for a specific policy problem takes time, and public officials have very little to spend on any one policy

problem. Policymakers are frustrated when they are forced to sift through research, much of which may be irrelevant to their specific questions.

Some policymakers and researchers are able to cultivate contacts in both the policy and research worlds, and can apply research findings to practical policy problems. As such, they become important information disseminators or brokers who bridge the gap between research and policy communities.

Brokers tend to share several characteristics. They are skilled at translating technical reports into "plain English". They are accessible — usually only a telephone call away — to answer specific questions about the policy relevance of a particular study. Because they can synthesize several research reports into short, policy-oriented commentary, brokers are often featured speakers at conferences and invited to give policy briefings. They actively maintain ties to and derive satisfaction from those ties to policy communities. Some have worked in both research and policy arenas, occasionally moving back and forth between academia and policymaking. Brokers are able to move beyond a general academic description of an issue to pull together specific policy recommendations. Two brokers mentioned frequently by the respondents were the Education Commission of the States and the Council for Exceptional Children.

A broker's ability to translate written documents into oral commentary is particularly important. This survey finds that policymakers use oral modes of information frequently, and rely heavily upon them. From the listing of 12 possible information sources described in Table 1, policymakers named informal networks the single most important source of useful information, ranking above all formal organizational sources. In their words, networks are an informal conduit of information comprised of professional experts in the field and informed friends, observers in various governmental roles, *ad hoc* coalitions of consumer and advocacy groups including attorneys. Networks are built up over a long period of time, for mutual protection and assistance. The school finance network spearheaded by the Ford Foundation included all of these elements.

Although survey respondents named many individuals and organizations as sources of crucial information, a few major sources emerged. These successful organizations all employ individuals who exhibit typical research broker characteristics. The organizations are also structured to facilitate communication among and between academicians, policy-

Table 1
IMPORTANT INFORMATION SOURCES FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS
IN THE AREAS OF SCHOOL FINANCE AND EDUCATION
FOR THE HANDICAPPED

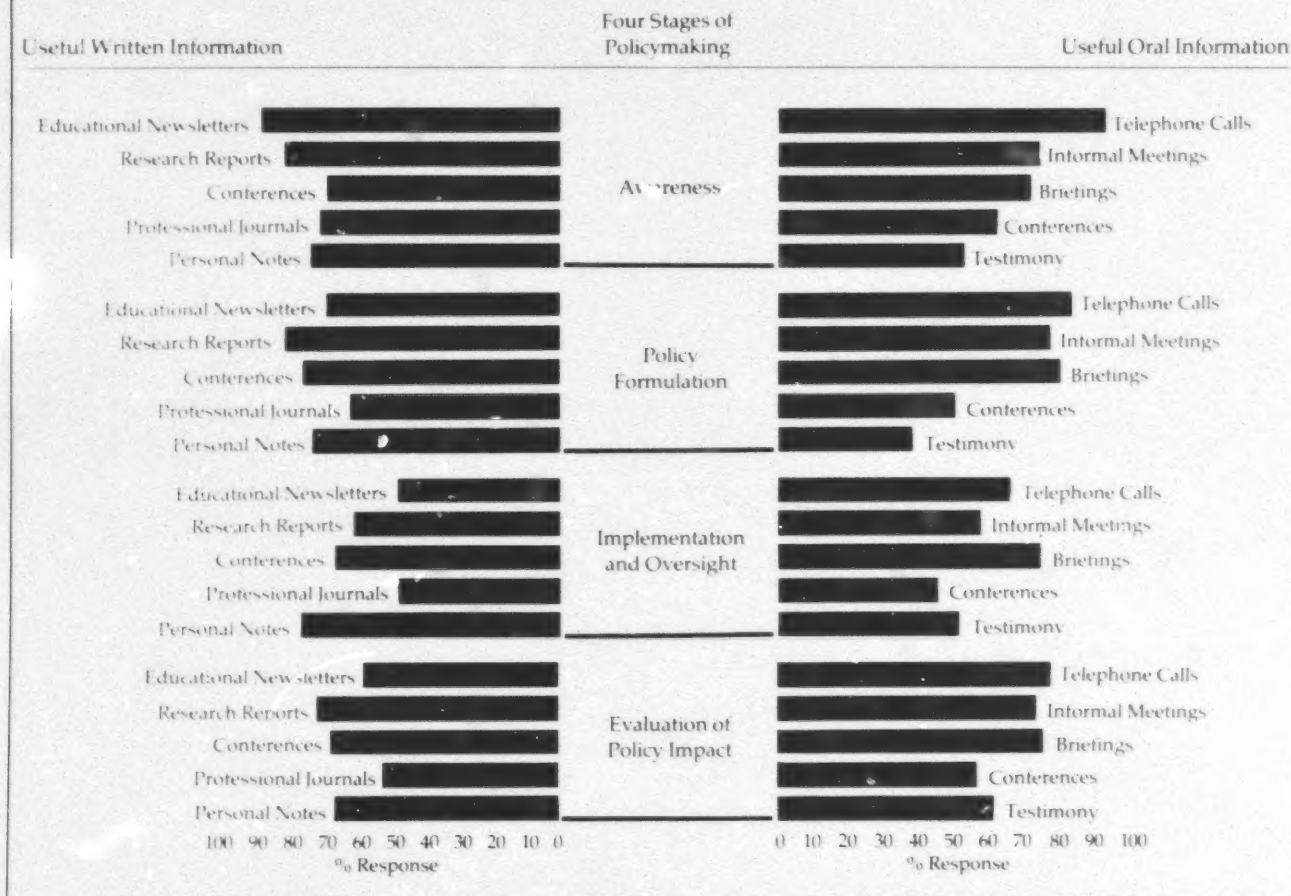
<i>Source of Useful Information</i>	<i>Percent Response</i>
Informal Networks	30%
State Departments of Education	25%
State Legislative Sources	12%
Professional Associations	6%
Federal Education Department	6%
Non-Profit Technical Assistance Organizations	5%
Contract Research Firms	5%
Special Interest Groups	4%
University Research	3%
National Information Services	2%
Federal Congressional Sources	1%
Press	.5%

N=266

98% of the policymakers from California, Virginia and Maryland responded to this question. The majority of the respondents were trained in education, law, political science, economics and health-related professions.

WHERE POLICYMAKERS FIND USEFUL INFORMATION

Political scientists divide the policymaking process into the four sequential stages noted on this graph. The results of IFG's survey of policymakers to determine the forms in which information is most useful for them demonstrate that different forms are useful at different stages of the policymaking process. During the awareness stage, when policymakers learn about emerging trends, problems and political movements, newsletters and telephone calls are important sources of information. When policymakers are debating and bargaining prior to passing legislation during the policy formulation stage, they find research reports and telephone calls most useful. After the activity is authorized, during the implementation and oversight stage, administrators rely most on statistical reports and briefings to obtain the necessary information for carrying out the intent of the bill. Finally, after the program has operated for a period of time, assessments of its success or failure are conducted. This is termed the policy impact stage when policymakers turn to research reports, telephone calls and briefings.



makers and practitioners. For example, each organization produces its own newsletter or encourages regular informal communication among its members. Working relationships among network members are generally maintained over time, allowing members to learn whom they can trust for reliable information. Members have access to mailing lists, including phone numbers, of the organization's members, assuring quick access to current information. Additionally, these organizations sponsor conferences on specific policy issues and bring together a mix of researchers, practitioners and policymakers. Conference participants meet and share ideas directly. Such opportunities for informal, direct communication

are considered particularly important by the state policymakers surveyed.

Research Could be More Useful

Half of the policy respondents indicated that they search for or are asked to provide information regarding their expertise one or more times daily. Such research consumers were quick to complain about the tremendous proliferation of research, of which only a limited amount was useful for their purpose. The difficulty is that the consumer cannot know how valuable research may prove to be prior to reading through the available material. Uncertainty about its value often leads a policymaker to consume either too much or too little: too much if the ultimate findings of

the research do not turn out to be relevant to the particular policy questions at hand and too little if the policymaker stops searching for information before finding the one study which may directly address a particular problem.

Over half the policymakers who responded to this survey expressed frustrations with research. Ninety percent of them identified one or more barriers which made use of research information difficult. Their difficulties included problems with the format and language of the reports, the political naivete of the researchers, and poor timing of published results.

Direct criticisms of the content of research or the technical competencies of re-

searchers were few. State education policymakers in this survey place a high value on good technical quality that is quantitative or comparative. However, they would use research information more often if it were more readily available, such as by telephone or direct mail newsletters that synthesize longer reports. Research should also be timed to coincide with legislative timetables and related to a specific policy discussion.

Brokers are able to move beyond a general academic description of an issue to pull together specific policy recommendations.

The research producing organizations surveyed included professional associations, government agencies, private technical assistance firms and lobbying groups in the areas of transportation, health and business. Their responses highlight a number of dilemmas faced by research producing organizations committed to disseminating their products. It is difficult for the research producer to know how much to invest in dissemination. Potential consumers of the information never know whether it is worthwhile to pay the costs in time and energy of consuming any particular chunk of information until they have actually done so.

For much the same reason, it is difficult to know whether the chosen dissemination strategies and tactics are effective. There is always the possibility that a different technique, a more novel gimmick or different disseminators would do a much better job of reaching an untapped audience. There is

also an inherent timing problem in that issues faced by policymakers are often short term, even sudden in arising, and they must seek answers quickly. In contrast, good research requires planning, data collection and analysis, and careful interpretation, all factors that are time consuming.

The information producing firms identified poor presentation of information as the primary reason that their information is not used by potential clients. Material that is too long, complicated or written too technically will not be widely read. Furthermore, while policymakers overwhelmingly say they prefer informal, oral modes of communication, information producing firms primarily disseminate written materials. Conferences, though time consuming, are considered useful for disseminating information among all policy groups. Since researchers as well as public employees, elected officials and officers of technical assistance and special interest organizations attend these meetings, they represent an important intersection of the policy and research worlds. Other dissemination activities that are reported to be effective by policymakers include lobbying, press conferences, convening of advisory boards and hiring consultants. The form of dissemination was considered to be as important as the content.

Conclusion

Research producers are generally aware that their work is difficult for policymakers to use. They know it is often too general, too technical, too lengthy and not

timed to coincide with policy debates. The underlying reality for state policymakers in the areas of school finance and education for the handicapped is that they do use research information and they know how to get it. They are tied into a network of colleagues, experts and informed organizations on whom they depend for current research. In each network, some key brokers have mastered the art of translating research to current policy considerations. A demand on the part of research producers and research consumers is the cultivation of more intermediaries to act as brokers of information.

The pressure on research producers to disseminate research information more effectively is strong. Expectations about productive dissemination need to be changed. Like oil drillers, policymakers should expect only a minority of their search efforts to be fully productive. Researchers should devote greater attention to identifying their policy audiences and using dissemination strategies that best meet that audience's needs. Even so, research is necessarily addressed to broader questions than the specific issues facing most policymakers. It can provide useful insights for a variety of settings, but it is rarely tailor-made for any one. Research cannot be expected to anticipate the idiosyncracies of a specific situation, factors that cannot be anticipated even by policymakers closer to the scene. Establishing more realistic expectations on the part of both policymakers and researchers is a crucial step toward creating a more productive partnership. ■

*This **Perspective** summarizes portions of a report "Policy Research and Educational Policy-Making: Toward a Better Connection", written by Eugene Bardach, Christopher Bellavita, Michael Kirst, Arnold Meltsner and Linda Nelson.*

*Additional copies of this **Policy Perspective** may be obtained by writing to IFG, School of Education, CERAS Building, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-1691.*
